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AUTHOR Imbrogno, Salvatore; Imbrogno, Nadia
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ABSTRACT

This paper designs a theoretical construct that integrates a number of mainstream systems of inquiry available to educational policymakers. Each system of inquiry has postulates, basic and derived concepts that characterize its epistemological foundations and methodological directives. None of these systems of inquiries, however, is proscriptive in the realization of purposeful planned change. A theoretical construct represents both a unified conception and an alternative system of inquiry for educational policy development. A theoretical construct has application for less developed and complex educational systems. Opportunities are thereby provided for experientials and experimentations in educational policy development. (Author/CJH)

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A Theoretical Construct for an Educational Policy Design

Dr. Salvatore Imbrogno
The Ohio State University
College of Social Work

Ms. Nadia Imbrogno, Ph.D. Candidate
The Ohio State University
College of Education

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International Education Society
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Toronto, Canada

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A Theoretical Construct For An Educational Policy Design

Dr. Salvatore Imbrogno, Phd
Ms. Nadia Ilyin Imbrogno, Phd Candidate

This paper designs a theoretical construct that can integrate a number of mainstream systems of inquiry available to educational policymakers. Each system of inquiry has postulates, basic and derived concepts that characterize its epistemological foundations and methodological directives. However,none of these system of inquiries are proscriptive in the realization of purposeful planned change. A theoretical construct represents both a unified conception and an alternative system of inquiry for educational policy development. A theoretical construct has application for less developed and complex educational systems.

A Theoretical Construct for an Educational Policy Design

Introduction

Major technological innovations with concomitant socio-economic and political changes have created a paramount need for educational reforms on a world wide scale. This need for change permeates all levels of the educational system: from the introduction of new teaching methods and techniques in the classroom to the formulation of new theories of learning and intelligence based on scientific advances in the behavioral and neurological sciences.

Hence, the educator, as a policymaker, is confronted with the task of encompassing all these manifold and dynamic movements into a unified thrust for educational reforms to prepare present and future generations of students for universal societal demands of the 21st century.

The policymaker in education is therefore in need of new strategies emanating from a variety of systems of inquiry to create educational goals, anticipating future needs and educational demands. This necessitates a unified policy system design which must communicate its program for planned change in such a manner that an educational system can transform these goals into corresponding action and purposeful behavior, irrespective of the complexity of the educational system.

Systems of Inquiry

A system of inquiry is a pattern of thought and action on how best to organize and manage an approximated reality for the purpose of policy goal setting. More specifically, policy formulation in education needs a conception based on a selected set of postulates in order to create a design to operationalize a desired policy goal or set of goals.

Once the goals are established by the policymaker in education, a number of strategies for their achievement become available through an analysis of existing systems of inquiry. Namely, the logic and rationality of "scientism;" the mediation of pluralism; the antagonism of dialectics; and the learning and problem solving of social experimentations. A strategy is synonymous with design in the planning and programming for the attainment of goals. Each system of inquiry with its concomitant strategies has a different impact on planning, programming and development. Each system contributes to knowledge acquisition and use of information and can be employed through an eclectic choice by leaders, planners and policymakers in education in any society at any given time. However, it should be noted that each of these systems of inquiry offers its own idiosyncratic perspective and epistemological conceptions on how reality ought to be designed.

These systems of inquiry, individually or collectively, achieve, seek, and set goals but are not goal directive. Namely, they do not provide purpose or direction in what will happen and what to do as the system evolves and changes in development and from "being to becoming."

This paper presents a new theoretical construct that "sweeps in" the above mentioned systems of inquiry into one unified conception for goal designation. This conception converges a plurality and polarity of parochial

perspectives and perceptions; different approximations of reality and fragmentary strategies to a higher level of planned developments in future educational policy. Finally, this paper will demonstrate that the coalescing of a number of systems of inquiry into a unified conception can be achieved most parsimoniously through the prescriptive notions of an educational policy designer.[1] It is these "a priori" articulations and heuristic assertions intrinsic to each system of inquiry that will be defined, identified and strategically engineered to achieve planning for policy in education.

An Overview of Systems of Inquiry

Scientism

A central feature in policy development, especially in its application to less developed countries, is the idea that policymakers gain knowledge through analytical simplification by first learning simplest and clearest things and then proceeding to more complex matters in a knowledge "building block" scenario through analytical decomposition. Yet we possess no "empirical data base" to validate that all knowledge building evolves from simplicity to complexity.

Scientism further suggests that knowledge in policy development can be acquired through direct empirical observations. Methods of measurements can then produce quantifiable and validated data. A tremendous emphasis is placed on the canons of applied research to arrive at linear causal relations in educational problems impacting on a system. Yet we know that there are multiple causes, all of which are interrelated and interdependent in a complex web of interactions. These generally reflect the customs, values and beliefs of the system under observation.

The procedure for analytical simplification and decomposition can best be characterized in a standardized policy research:

1. The structuring of a policy problem is conceptualized and specified; that is the means to maximize the ends are known and are available.
2. Policy alternatives, goals and objectives can be predicted based on empirical data.
3. Independent variables can be isolated and subjected to scrutiny as discrete categories.
4. A relationship within and between the independent variables can be established.
5. The controlled variables can be separated from the non-controllable.
6. Probabilistic predictions can be developed for non-controllables.
7. The stable and adaptive variables can be determined.
8. A relationship can be established between independent and dependent variables.[2]
9. Choices are made of those controllables variables that can be maximized.

This logical deductive system, with minor variations, is found in such studies as educational needs assessment, prioritizations, mainstream program evaluation, operations research, etc. The rationale for this position is best exemplified in statements that educational policy research is a form of inquiry or investigation undertaken, with the aid of standardized research procedures, to generate valid and reliable data needed in policymaking.

This of course does not always happen. Even the logical apparatus is subject to value interpretations by the "independent observer." Michael Sheret recalls numerous examples where researchers compute coefficients of variations without due regard of the weighing factors involved. It was noted

that this neglect casts doubt on the validity of the conclusions of as yet unpublished educational research.[3]

Through the use of the canons of scientific research, alternatives, goals and objectives to solve a problem can be analyzed, strategically prioritized and then quantified to attain the most efficient and effective decisions for maximization. It is an irreversible process though the introduction of feedback mechanisms allows for some modification. Elaborate mathematical and probabilistic equations are formulated based on an empirical data analysis of past events and occurrences. In essence, this system of inquiry makes predictions for (1) the existing criteria that govern scientific research; (2) and the mathematical tools available for decision analysis. The educational goals and objectives are based on empirical data.

Scientism is not a purposeful activity to induce qualitative value changes that are fundamental to the basic fiber of any social system. More often than not, this system of inquiry becomes a strategy for mirroring past conditions. Despite its limitations, scientism is being used extensively in social research and has become a model for less developed countries.

Meliorative/Pluralism

Policymakers in education prescribing to this view advance the position that equilibrium is a desirable state in educational adjustment, adaptation and integration. Adjustments, adaptation and integration are believed to be generally known and attainable by a system irrespective of its level of complexity. A concept of "equilibrium," on closer scrutiny, represents in the mind of the professional a selection of choices derived from a given composite of social values and social norms, perceived as critical for the preservation and maintenance of the existing educational system. Thus, the preservation

and maintenance of the equilibrium becomes paramount and governs the conditions under which all strategic decisions are made in education. Decisions are restricted, omitted or limited by the social values established by those in power. This view of decision making has come to be known as disjointed incrementalism, comprised of serial, remedial and fragmentary actions in education.[4]

Every educational system, irrespective of its level of scientific or technological advancement, it is argued, must inherently possess basic functional requisites for the maintenance of its patterns of equilibrium; the capacity for integrating external environmental value inputs for change; a structural differentiation to adapt to changing external conditions; and goals necessary to preserve its perpetual existence and development. This focus on equilibrium, maintenance and unidimensionality is a reactive process based on a response to perturbation, dysfunctions and deviance.

Educational policy viewed from a perspective of meliorative/pluralism, is the result of a mutual interactive process that achieves stability for an educational system, its external environment and members. A social adjustment is sought whenever the functional requisites are perturbed by an "ill or a crises" emanating from within or outside the system. The primary strategic function of the professional educator in policymaking is to promote and protect the social values that comprise the system. In other words, maintain and preserve a status quo; restore the system's equilibrium whenever it is perturbed by an external force through a variety of coalitions, cooptation and adaptive techniques; adjust the individual's behavior to the requirements of the system by meliorating conflicts, issues and problems through the processes of bargaining, consensus and compromises of differences of those in power.

There is no known or an agreed upon strategy for goal formulation and setting of objectives; all necessary conditions for the direction and guidance of an educational system. The interactive process of the system, its members and environment serve as an end in and of itself. This process becomes more important to those participating than the system's overall purpose for existence.

The conditions that govern the strategy for the use of this inquiry are as follows:

1. The reaction to an educational perturbation must lead to remedial actions, resulting in short-term benefits with a purposeful avoidance of any long-term commitments.
2. Each incremental decision, it is understood, will resolve a single perturbation as a one-time occurrence without consideration for preceding or succeeding decisions.
3. Participation in the processes of mutual adjustment will resolve (not solve) an educational perturbation for the purpose of preserving and maintaining the system, rather than giving it direction and guidance for the future.

The impact of this system of inquiry was aptly described as "piecemeal." It has been criticized as producing a hodepodge of inadequate, overlapping and poorly coordinated agencies and programs. Its preoccupation with smaller concerns has been at the expense of the development of a more comprehensive educational program development.

Dialectic

Knowledge emanating from this system of inquiry assumes that conflict in educational systems is ubiquitous. There exists a multiplicity of values and

diversity of interests that inevitably will generate a polarity of opposing positions that can only be resolved through the creation of a new course of action that simultaneously subsumes and transcends the diverging positions.[5] Sets of criteria are advanced to support the position that educational change requires antagonism and discontinuity with the past. Change can only be advanced through strategic use of the dialectic in development:

1. There exists in all social systems authority established by law. Elected or appointed officials of boards of education produce official leaders in the educational system; critical decisions must be made whenever authority and power in the system is exercised or redistributed. This can range from a bureaucratic elite to a cadre of professional practitioners. It is the elite who decide on actions necessary for implementation of an educational program, service and project. An emerging technocratic elite controls and decides on the information flow within and from outside the system.
2. Power elites in a conflict ridden climate of adversary relations acquire and utilize power to advance specific interests whether it be political, economic or professional. A dialectic process in education for "human betterment and social progress" is unilaterally instituted, if for no other reason than planning and leadership requires political sanctions. The meaning given to the interpretation of educational change is contingent upon how the "power elite" perceives its purpose and direction.
3. Conflict, power and elitism form a triadic relation in the political processes of education by which authority and control is distributed and exercised. Centralized power is acquired so as to strategically organize and manage change. It places the inputs of educational policy under conditions that will always generate resistance to change. (i.e.,

conflict management). The use of power in educational development, i.e., evolutionary or revolutionary, has distinct reallocative purposes. It is thought that conflict is likely to ensue upon any effort at operationalizing this concept.

Intrinsic to these sets of criteria is the assumption that those who decide on the nature and quality of education will be in continuous conflict with those who advance opposing ideas as to how education ought to pursue its ends. Perhaps more importantly, Basil Berstein observed . . . "How society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers public reflects both the distribution of power and the principle of social change."[6] A dialectic view of education is a practice mode that generates turbulence while striving for a synthesis of diametrically opposing sets of criteria.

Education placed within the context of a dialectic system of inquiry, is a strategy that purposefully (i.e., a practice of agitation) generates tension, stress and strain. Educational change is imbued with conflict, which in turn, creates new patterns and relations in the educational system. Conflictual relations between those who rule and those who are ruled is an endless process of antagonism in which education benefits or is victimized depending on who has authority and control over the setting of goals.

Experimentation

This system of inquiry produces knowledge as a policy, program or service evolves in development.[7] Its use is an expression of a social system that is confronted with an unusually new, unanticipated or "wicked" educational problem in which educational experimentation is the only strategic alternative to initiate action. Within this context, educational policy is perceived as

an evolving process in which a great deal of learning from experience in problem solving will take place in practice. This is perceived as the only way to confront an original educational problem for which there existed no known or agreed upon solution.

An educational policy process requires, therefore, introducing heuristics, a number of alternatives as guides to action. It becomes necessary to analyze and synthesize known alternative courses of action perceived to be most conducive to getting the "show on the road." Strategic decisions are made based on "trade-offs" of the critical variables of cost, time, performance and place of implementation. A number of intermittent modifications in design are anticipated in sequential development. As the classroom teacher in practice solves partial aspects of a problem, immediate changes and modifications are instituted in the functioning of the whole system and new goals are pursued in accordance with emerging and changing developments.

Social experimentation, as a process in sequential development, is committed to change in unexpected occurrences: (a) the structuring of the educational problem, that is, the original problem will acquire a different configuration as experimentation proceeds; (b) knowledge, information and technology will be advanced and made available, to enhance learning and problem solving; (c) criteria to observe and measure any one alternative course of action can be efficiently and effectively operationalized, as for example, assessing the rate of technology advanced in a given community; and (d) the amount and quality of resources available to pursue a program or project in development.

A strategy for social experimentation in sequential development calculates the rationale for program planning. Innovation based on the selection

of alternative courses of action provides opportunity to evolve so that more viable decisions can be made from everyday experiences.

A Critique of Existing Systems of Inquiry

These four systems of inquiry under study are critical in producing knowledge for education in policy or practice: (1) each system of inquiry has implications and/or application in issues, problems, needs in education at given points in time, place and role of its participants; (2) each system of inquiry viewed as an eclectic, broadens the choice over the epistemological and methodological base to policy in education; (3) each system of inquiry offers its own idiosyncratic perspective of policy development as to how the reality ought to be organized and managed; (4) each system of inquiry can move horizontally or vertically on a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions.

However, choices made for knowledge utilization in policy of education is directly related to the values, interest and belief system of the user. For example, if an approximation of reality is lodged in a physical replication of the educational system, then scientism with its logical apparatus and physical laws that govern inquiry becomes the strategic value of choice. If, the policymaker's value system dictates the maintenance and perpetuation of the establishment, then the choice for usable knowledge is by the meliorative/pluralistic system of inquiry. If change in education is perceived as a process of agitation for progress that requires new educational order, then reality is approximated to be in sets of values committed to stress, strain and tension. Finally, if there is no clarity or agreement as to how to resolve an original problem, then the realistic perspective is to experiment with various possibilities.

Any one or combination of these choices of systems of inquiries could be perceived as a serious limitation and shortcoming by those subscribing to a different approximation of reality.

Each system of inquiry, however, is empirically data-based bound to approximate an existing reality that provides the basis for descriptions and explanations of the education policy content process and outcomes. None of these systems of inquiry provide a prospective rationale (i.e., know what will happen and what to do.) Each lacks direction and guidance to move a system in its social development from an existing condition towards a planned and hopefully more desirable future state. They are not purposefully goal directed towards a desideratum. Nor do they provide the conception necessary for a unified framework to engineer the means to realize these ends.

A Unified Conception for Policy Design

Emerging Role of the Policy Designer

A critical dimension in a unified conception of education for policy design is that purposeful activity leading to planned change in engineered towards a desired educational end where the means are designed for its realization. A unified conception in educational policy development refers to the arrangement of, and the processes of arranging and rearranging the educational and technical resources to accomplish various societal goals. An engineering perspective to educational change, with a need to reorder, reshape and reorganize is a natural response to the inevitable changes occurring in the internal and external milieu of the educational system that is designed to achieve societal goals. This view is in line with those who would hold that education focuses on enhancing the capacity of people who work continuously for their own and society's benefit. Hence, education given a unified

conception to generate and design planned change assumes a leading role in promoting societal systems to higher levels of complexification.[8]

A unified conception of policy design is a system engineered through the coalescence of creative and rational human activity. A critical factor in this equation is that an educational policy designer is viewed as a professional with a pivotal strategic role. The policy designer becomes a centrifugal force in educational systems that are dynamic, turbulent and in states of flux. Here change is perceived as ubiquitous. The policy designer engages in creative synthesis of interventions and by reshaping and remolding what is known creates and structures new designs. The execution of planned change includes analytical and rational behavior on the part of the designer. This is in direct contrast to traditional conceptual roles of professional educational policy designers as mediators, facilitators, agitators or advocators.

Basic and Derived Concepts for an Educational Policy Designer

A unified conceptualization for an educational policy designer encompasses the integration of the basic postulates of each existing system of inquiry, their epistemological foundations and strategies for implementation. This unified theoretical construct entails the following:

1. A system inquiry for a design that encompasses a constellation of educational activities, programs and services on multi-levels of structural involvement (i.e., local, state and federal); and concurrently provide guidance and direction in the selection of strategies and tactics necessary for micro-level concrete applications.

2. A strategy for a system of educational policy design that can hypothesize "ideal ends" for education by using the empirical data of past observations and generalizations derived from a cyclical deductive and inductive analysis.[9]

3. A system of inquiry that can produce the knowledge necessary for a methodology (practice mode) applicable to both experientials (description and explanations of existing conditions) and experimentations (prescriptions of what ought to be.)

Hence, a unified theoretical construct coaleses all usable knowledge building "in and about" policy in education from contributions in scientism, pluralism, dialectic and social experimentation.

Implications for Educational Practice

A unified theoretical construct for an educational policy is goal directive and provides purpose and direction to the system as it evolves and changes in development. This form of inquiry envisions the future by placing emphasis on "creating knowledge" for more ideal ends which carries with it an innovative social design function of choosing the most rational means to achieve them. Hence creative activity is placed on a continuum with logic and rationality in the realization of specific goals. A policy designer as a strategist, is involved in human creative rational action in which the "being is becoming, the doing requires thinking," etc. This results in a co-producive activity that meets immediate and concrete social needs while simultaneously pursuing "what ought to be."

A unified theoretical construct is distinct in thought and action from different sets of inquiries, roles and behavior patterns, along with their accompanying strategies and tactics for policy change or adjustment. This

form of inquiry overcomes the inconsistencies often found in independent findings derived from different systems of inquiries executed by isolated disciplinary studies. The educational policy designer can move the inquiry from analytical reductionism (what each inquiry does independently) to synthesis complexification (how a concrescence of these contributions to knowledge produces a new and more complex social educational perspective). As a result, the policy designer can consolidate polarities of positions to be used in educational development by moving the inquiry through a critical path to a higher level of abstraction and complexification. For example, a creative goal might be to invent a new educational system in light of what it wants as a reflection of existing descriptions of social and human needs as well as to anticipate any prospective changes that will emerge.

A unified theoretical construct for educational policy must communicate its program for planned change in such a manner that a system can transform these plans into corresponding actions which, in fact, meet the goals in the same way as the design proposed as a means to initiate purposeful behavior.

A system, less developed or complex, must be perceived as capable and able of achieving what it wants, so that a design can be engineered in the direction of a goal. All systems still require a rational appraisal of their goals, outcomes and performance notably, a feedback mechanism for self regulation. A policy designer in education must solicit broad base cooperation in self-identification expressed through participation in attaining and anticipating common pursuits; in coordinating the multi-levels of structure and processes that must be differentiated and coalesced; must constantly create conditions for change in its educational institutions. It is expected that education as a social institution will continuously be confronted with new challenges and directions in development.

Summary

A unified conception for educational policy was designed through a coalescence of a polarity and plurality of existing systems of inquiry. Each system of inquiry possesses its idiosyncratic and parochial values reflected in policy formulation and implementation but none of which represents a comprehensive and proscriptive perspective. A unified conception for educational policy serves as alternative design by incorporating the basic postulates to each and then elevates them into a higher level of generalization, providing opportunities for experientials and experimentations in educational policy development.

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